Books

Owls of Britain and Europe. A. A. Wardhaugh. 1983. Blandford Press, Poole, Dorset, U. K. 128 pp. $16.95 U.S.; $21.95 Can.

Owls of Britain and Europe has far more to offer North American readers than might be inferred from its title. The first 42 pages consist of an easy-flowing authoritative layman's summary of the biology and mythology of owls of the World, including origins, adaptive radiation, and especially the various physiological and structural attributes that enable them to fly and/or capture prey in various light conditions. The final two chapters, "A comparison of lifestyles" and "watching owls," lean heavily on British examples but apply equally wherever owls occur. The comparison, although billed by the publisher as "unique" is basically a concise but relatively thorough review of the ecology of owls, similar to those found in other recent books on specific families or orders of birds. Even the two middle chapters, "Owls resident in Britain," and "European owls not resident in Britain," contain much of interest to North Americans, as capsule summaries (3-7 pp.) of the life histories and sometimes conservation problems/solutions of species also occuring in North America (Barn, Snowy, Long-eared, Short-eared, Hawk, Great Gray, Tengmalm's = Boreal) or with close relatives here (Little, Tawny, Scops, Eagle, European Pygmy, Ural). The "bibliography" (really selected references) and index add to the book's usefulness.

Although few references are cited directly in the book, the author has researched his topic thoroughly and most of the sources can be deduced from the reference list. There appear to be no errors of fact, and the only proof-reading slip that I noticed was 'artic" for arctic on p. 109. The omission of the major owl bibliography by Clark *et al.,* published by the National Wildlife Federation in 1978 is unfortunate, and the chapter on observation techniques would have been more useful to banders if banding and trapping methods had been added, but one can find few other faults. The only direct mention of banding is the reference to radio-tracking as an aid to feeding studies on Tawny Owls, but much of the other life history information is based wholly or partially on studies that involved banding. Attractive black-and-white and color photographs will doubtless add to the book's salability, but perhaps inflated the price somewhat if viewed on a per page basis. Nevertheless, the price is modest in today's book market, and the information value high.

Martin McNicholl

Bird-banding at Powdermill: twenty years review. Robert C. Leberman and D. Scott Wood. 1983. Powdermill Nature Reserve Research Report No. 42. Carnegie Mus. Nat. Hist., Pittsburgh, Penn. 49 pp. No price stated.

This twenty-year review shows how much can be accomplished by a small staff and numerous volunteers at a permanent banding station. The contents include a brief historical introduction and accounts of research, education, and the banding operation. The banding report, comprising the bulk of the review, consists of a graph of the number of operating days per ten day period, a table of more detail on days of operation, the number of original bandings of each species each year, the 25 most commonly banded species in the 1959-1971 and 1972-1982 periods, a 9-page table of recoveries (both of Powdermill-banded birds elsewhere and birds banded elsewhere recovered at Powdermill), maps of recoveries for 9 species, a table of repeats and returns, and a brief summary of future directions. The final chapter discusses population trends and features of significance in each group of birds banded.

Operators of other banding stations will find much of interest in this report, with its emphasis on changes through the years in banding totals of most species. The authors have evaluated these changes on a species by species level to ascertain whether each apparent trend is probably real (reflecting habitat changes), is more likely a reflection of changes in banding effort and/or technique, or is probably a combination of both, with local habitat changes resulting in changes in bird species composition and also a shift in banding technique.

The recovery table and maps provide abundant information of direct interest to other banders, especially in eastern North America. The many research programs, conducted after deliberate and careful planning or fortuitously when presented by the birds, should help suggest projects elsewhere.

The recovery maps and tables supply detailed data without burdening the text, but the latter flows well and is written for a general audience. I was not aware of any errors or overly stated claims. Production lapses appear restricted to the lack of reference in the text to Table E (returns and repeats), and three minor errors in citing literature. The reference to the Swainson's Thrush return (p. 41) should have cited Leberman and Clench 1978 instead of Clench and Leberman; Parkes' assignment of a Yellow Warbler to an Alaskan race (p. 43) was in his 1968 note, not 1966; and Clench 1973 (p. 43) should read 1973a.

This little publication is of value to banders everywhere.

Martin McNicholl

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Average Weights of Birds. T. Brough. 1983. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Aviation Bird Unit, Worplesdon Laboratory, Gildford, Surrey, GU3 3LQ. 131 pp., no price listed.

As the author states "this paper lists the average weights (and ranges, where known) of 2256 bird species obtained from some 250 reference sources. It has been prepared largely for the benefit of people interested in birdstrike problems to aircraft." Its origins were in a card index system which could provide engineers with the probable size (mass) of birds involved in collisions with aircraft. It updates earlier works by Fowler (1967; 110 species) and Kaiser (1970; 270 species). In some cases data from a single source have been used, but more commonly all available data are pooled and "a personal assessment of the average weight" is presented along with the source(s). The range is all too often lacking, as is any statistical evaluation of the sample variation as the standard deviation. Weights over 100 grams are presented to the nearest whole gram; those under 100 g to the nearest tenth of a gram. The data for sexes are presented separately "only in those species whose differences appear significant and are known." The species list (table 1.) is in alphabetical sequence by genus and species with some appropriate cross referencing where several names have been in use in recent literature.

To prepare a complete list of body weights of the birds of the world would be a monumental undertaking, requiring the ferreting out of data in obscure sources, sometimes for even common species. Although this list represents the fullest compendium under a single cover of which I am aware, it falls far short of a representation of all data currently available. This is understandable when as the author states "there are no intensive searching of the literature for appropriate references." The list grew "almost on an *ad hoc* basis" with references being added "whenever we happen [ed] to come across them." However, a major work on weights of birds in eastern North America (Clench and Leberman, 1978) was not "found" and most certainly would have improved the coverage of numerous species, particularly with respect to the sample size, which all too often depended upon the far less extensive data presented by Hartman (1961). Unfortunately, the Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club was not among the five ornithological journals searched for weight data, as at least six papers dealing specifically with bird weights appeared in this source between 1973 and 1981 and one of them alone (Thomas, 1982) would have added 37 species to the list and another (Collins, 1972) an additional 23 species. The inclusion of a few more standard regional works as ffrench (1973) would also have improved the sample sizes and species coverage. The more recent compendium by Dunning (1984) sets a far higher standard for completeness, albeit for a more restricted geographical area.

I question the choice of an alphabetical sequence of species and whether it is any more useful to non-ornithologist engineers than a phylogenetic listing with scientific and common name indices (see Dunning, 1984). The latter approach would have made this paper immeasurably more readily useful to ornithologists and banders, particularly those who might be a source of additional data or references.

Although this list of bird weights may largely serve the more limited goals perceived by its author, serious doubts could be raised about the usefulness for other purposes of values derived from pooled data from several disparate sources, where local or regional biases could distort the values presented particularly when sample sizes are small. Numerous differences exist between the data presented in this list and similar data in other sources. Without statistical treatment of intraspecific variation, the significance of these differences cannot be assessed. This brings into question the usefulness of any such compendium where all available data are not presented and not just pooled data (as here) or data from the best single source (Dunning, 1984). Publication space clearly limits the number of data sets that can be presented separately for each species if the total avifauna of a region or the world is being covered. Detailed treatment of intraspecific variation, although of necessity outside the scope of the more general compendia, may ultimately prove to be of more significant value and appropriate publication outlets for these data should be sought.

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Charles T. Collins

Books

A Dictionary of Birds Bruce Campbell and Elizabeth Lack (eds). Buteo Books, Vermillion, SD. 704 pp, over 500 Illus.

Compiled for the British Ornithologists' Union, this new work is in line of sucession from Newton's "A Dictionary of Birds" (1896) and Arthur Landsborough Thomson's "A New Dictionary of Birds" (1964), now long out of print. This book is encyclopaedic in its format and could be a good reference in "birders'," banders' and ornithologists' libraries alike.

Frances James, President of the American Ornithologists' Union, writes in her preface of "the role this dictionary will play in fostering communications among nations. For students it will serve as an entrance to the present status of the field. For scientists it will serve as a research tool and a bridge between disciplines."

This book consists of articles on general subjects relating to birds and on different kinds of birds, treated by families. The treatment is alphabetical, with cross references in small capitals, so the dictionary consistutes its own index.

Over 280 world-renowned ornithologists contributed their expertise, with less than 20% of these being American. With the highly qualified ornithologists the USA has produced since the turn of the century, surely a larger segment of Americans could have contributed to this volume. I looked for several names, well known in the bird and dictionary worlds in the list of contributors but found none. I was very disappointed at this oversight.

The text consisted of over 1,010,000 words, supported by more than 500 photographs, drawings and diagrams. It would have been nice to have at least the drawings done in color. Case in point: ALIMENTARY SYSTEM would be much easier to understand had it been in color, as would the NERVOUS SYSTEM.

This volume is a dictionary in the strict sense of the word and NOT an identification guide. There are generalized descriptions of plumage characteristics for families as well as nesting practices, etc. There is much up-to-date information, including references which are limited to books, monographs and important papers. In some cases, references have been added which were published too recently to be used in the articles concerned. English names of birds chosen are those used by British ornithologists. North American names and others used in the English-speaking world have also been covered as far as practicable.

For readers who do not have the 1964 "Dictionary of Birds" on your bookcase shelf, this book is a good edition. I think the price is a little high, especially in view of the fact that there is no color. I hope that the BOU and the publisher will see fit to reduce it some time soon. If and when they do, buy it; you will not be sorry.

Mrs. Roger W. Foy